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SUBJECT: Bad Weather Making It Hard on Stranded Guangzhou Train Travelers

REF: GUANGZHOU 0048

(U) This document is sensitive but unclassified. Please protect accordingly.

11. (SBU) Summary: As many as 200,000 stranded passengers continue to wait at the main Guangzhou train station with most standing outside or seeking shelter in nearby buildings. Despite deteriorating weather conditions, the majority of travelers do not seem dissuaded from continuing their homeward travel over the Chinese New Year. No new incidents of public disturbance have been reported, and Premier Wen Jiabao visited the train station to observe conditions and speak with local leaders. End summary.

12. (SBU) Conditions worsened for the estimated 200,000 people who remain stranded at the city's main train station. Officials believe travel for nearly 800,000 rail, air and bus passengers has been disrupted throughout Guangdong province. In Guangzhou, periodic heavy rains and colder temperatures have contributed to the atmosphere of fatigue and frustration, especially for thousands who continue to wait outside the station. Police officers have blocked off the plaza immediately in front of the station; huge crowds have moved to positions underneath a highway overpass outside Railway Station Square.

13. (SBU) Although local media reported numbers outside the square declining on January 30 to 23,000, Congenoffs who twice visited the station over the past 24 hours judged the area to be more crowded and densely packed with people. Police presence continues to keep the crowds orderly with officers dispersed throughout. A heavy cordon of security personnel are in position at barriers in front of all station entrances. Local media had reported a major disturbance on January 29th; however, Congenoffs confirmed that the incident had actually occurred the previous day, in part explaining the significant police numbers observed yesterday.

14. (SBU) Local media reports have also indicated that 60,000 people among the stranded passengers are sheltered in the Liuhua Convention Center, three blocks south of the train station. Congenoffs who visited the site on January 30 observed it to be much more crowded than the previous day. Water and food are still available for sale at reasonable prices. In spite of some efforts to collect garbage, floors in the building were dirty, and no provision for cots or sleeping arrangements had been made; many people sat or slept on newspapers, or the bare floor.

15. (U) Premier Wen Jiabao arrived in the city on the morning of January 30, and met with officials from the Ministry of Railways, Guangdong PSB, and other agencies. Local media reported that Premier Wen instructed local authorities to help ensure the supply of electric power and food for stranded passengers.

16. (SBU) Although authorities continue to encourage passengers to

cash in rail tickets and return home, many remain determined to complete their travel plans. Local government and businesses have reportedly offered assistance in returning tickets, including cash bonuses for workers willing to stay; and a local newspaper reported that as of Tuesday, 8,000 stranded passengers had used free transportation to return to their work place, giving up their travel plans. However, a group of three young men and one woman told Congenoffs that even though they had waited at the train station for five days, they were still determined to travel back to their home province and see their families.

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